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## WAS ISRAEL REALLY A SEPARATE NATION?

It is quite common, in our representation of the different dealings with Israel, to speak of the nation as "apart" and "separate." The idea generally sought to be conveyed, and the prevailing conception concerning the matter, is that Israel was selected and actually separated from all the world; put to one side, as it were, in order that, being out of and away from the world at large, she might receive the divine message, which, in turn, should be conveyed by her to this same world. The principles involved in this conception are:

*THE COMMON  
IMPRESSION*

1. The necessity of being removed from contact with the world in order to receive the divine message, and
2. The possibility of being able to give a message to the world while in a state of separation from it.

Is either of these principles a sound one, and is it a historical fact that Israel was actually separated from her sister-nations? The question is one of not merely local or archaeological interest. It has to do with the fundamental principles of teaching and life.

We may pass over the fact that the Abrahamic tribes, when they entered Palestine, entered into the inheritance of all that Palestine had been gathering up for many centuries, and, in so far as a nomadic people could do so, appropriated this rich inheritance. We may also, for a moment, forget the relationship sustained by the Israelitish tribes to Egypt during two or three or four centuries of Israel's

*CONTACT WITH  
CANAANITISH  
CIVILIZATION*

sojourn in Egypt, although it is ordinarily understood and taught that Israel was thus brought into contact with Egypt in order, as a younger nation, to learn from the older nation something of its civilization. How was it with the Canaanitish people and their civilization? Was Israel kept apart from it? Is it not rather true that Israel was led to adopt the very language of the nation with which she was to come into such bitter conflict, the Canaanitish and Hebrew languages being practically the same? Was she not permitted to mingle freely with the Canaanitish people, sometimes in control, at other times in subjection, at all times side by side with them? And did not this intimate relationship exist through centuries?

But it may be asked: What purpose was gained by this intimacy? The answer is, education. Israel was being educated. The Canaanitish civilization was far in advance of the Israelitish. It contained very much which would prove only injurious to Israel. It contained much, however, which Israel must have in order to fulfil her destiny. The good and the bad came together. There were periods when the bad element was in the supremacy; but, in spite of the fact that there was much evil influence in the relationship, it was a part of the divine plan that Israel should sustain this relationship to Canaan. An analogy might be found in the removal of a countryman today to a large city. Such a removal is attended with advantage and disadvantage. In some cases it means ruin, in other cases prosperity. It is impossible to secure the higher advantages of life without taking at the same time the risk of obtaining only lower possibilities.

If we follow the Israelitish nation into the next great epoch of its history, we find a close relationship with Assyria, and a little later with Babylon, these two powers being in effect one, and dominating the same portion of the world at different times. For two centuries or more Israel was under the tutelage of this empire. The prophets recognized the fact that the land of Palestine was full of Assyrian notions. The people of all classes were strongly

**CONTACT  
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BABYLONIAN  
CIVILIZATION**

affected by this Assyrian influence. The Assyrian army again and again made its way into the very heart of Palestine, right up to the gates of Jerusalem, and the climax of this historical period was the transportation of Israel into the heart of Babylonia. There they lived nearly a century under the direct tutorship of this foreign power. Can any closer relationship be imagined? Was Israel in any sense kept apart from Assyria and Babylon? Was she not brought into contact so close that even a large portion of her own people ceased to be Israelites and remained Babylonians to the very end? And did she not receive an impress during these centuries, both for good and for bad, which is to be seen on every page of the Old Testament literature? At the cost of many disasters to temple, city, and state, this educational process was conducted. Did ever a nation pay such a price for its education? A careful study of Israel's latest history shows how cheap this education was, even at the great price paid.

For fifteen hundred years Israel was guided from one place to another among the nations, and in these centuries was brought into contact with the most advanced civilization of the times. One by one the nations from which she received instruction died away, but the pupil continued to live and to transmit the good in each of these great civilizations which it was the divine will to propagate.

In the next great period of Israel's history something different meets us. It is at this period that the method of instruction in vogue for fifteen centuries suffers modification. New circumstances demand new treatment. Israel, from contact with the world's civilizations, and from the teaching of her own great teachers, has come into the possession of truth concerning God and man, and the relationship of God and man, which must be preserved. The doctrine of monotheism and the doctrine of the heinousness of sin, the doctrine of spiritual communion between man and his Creator—these, and other fundamental teachings, are to come in conflict with still another civilization, the most powerful which

**A PERIOD OF  
SEPARATION  
FOR A SPECIAL  
PURPOSE**

Israel has yet been called to meet. The Hellenic culture had conquered the entire world. Rome, in spite of her armies, was held in subjection. Nothing in the world's history had yet shown itself to be so strong as the pen of the Greek. Was Greek culture to be permitted to pervade and destroy the results of these long centuries of Hebrew teaching? The conflict was the most critical that the world has ever seen. It came, and Jewish truth, though somewhat modified, remained substantially unchanged. This was made possible, in accordance with the divine plan, because in this last period Israel had actually been set apart by the working of the Levitical ceremonial. There had grown up a national exclusiveness for which history produces no analogy. Israel incased herself in a rough prickly covering, which, for the time being, enabled her to avoid the risk of too close a contact with the power of the Greek. It was in this period that there grew up so many practices which, even to this day, separate the Jew from the gentile. It was a demand of the times. But it was exceptional, and by this very fact disputes the truth of the proposition that this was the regular method.

There was a time, therefore, in Israel's history, when it became necessary that she be set apart and separated from the world. But this time did not come until the great truths which the world was to receive through her had been revealed. It was for the purpose of preservation rather than that of instruction that this plan was adopted. The work of education had, in a sense, been finished.

Two or three points suggest themselves in this connection as worthy of our consideration:

1. One has a very faulty conception of Israelitish and Jewish history who supposes that during the twenty centuries before Christ, and during the period of the nation's education, it was separated from the other nations of the earth. Exactly the opposite is true. Israel was led to mingle with other nations as perhaps no other nation before or since has mingled with the world at large, and it may not be inappropriate to suggest that this fact, with those which

*ISRAEL NOT  
SEPARATED*

accompany it, explains, as nothing else can explain, Israel's peculiar place in the world today.

2. The divine method in dealing with the nation and the individual is after all a common-sense method, and exemplifies  
*THE DIVINE METHOD THE ORDINARY ONE* the very principles in accordance with which the mind of humanity itself has been constituted. To educate the child one does not separate him from his fellow-beings or from the world. Education consists in bringing him into contact with his fellow-beings and the world. This is all.

3. At certain times, in certain exigencies, new methods are demanded. Those for a given period may seem to be, and indeed may be, entirely contradictory as compared  
*SEPARATION ONLY TEMPORARY* with old methods; but it will always be found that the methods demanded by a certain situation are those which accord with great principles, and that, while the methods may be contradictory, the underlying principles imply no such contradiction. There are times in the history of an individual or a nation when, for the purpose of reflection, for the purpose of gathering together strength in order to perform some great deed, concentration is required. This may mean temporary isolation, temporary separation from everything that distracts, but this is only an incident in the history of the individual or the nation. And the very purpose of this temporary separation will prove to be larger and more comprehensive contact with the very world from which, for a time, separation has taken place. Israel's separation from the world was only an incident in twenty centuries of history. The method of education employed by Jehovah throughout these centuries was that which all experience shows to have been and to be based upon fundamental principles.